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It was the purpose of this study to trace the conditions during the thirteenth century which, along with prior supernatural beliefs, led to the development of witchcraft in that century. With emphasis placed on the thirteenth century Church, and social, intellectual and economic changes certain conclusions appear valid.

For thousands of years before the thirteenth century primitive man believed in supernatural beings. Ancient mythology abounded with references to witches. Early medieval Europe, primarily France, southern Germany, and surrounding areas with similar cultural inheritance which are the areas of this study, knew much of witches and witchcraft. However, until the thirteenth century there was no undue concern over the witches' activities.

The thirteenth century experienced a number of abrupt changes which affected all members of society to some degree. As feudalism dissolved, the social structure underwent unsettling changes. Economic prosperity affected the mental outlook of many; earthly concerns preempted eternal considerations. Towns multiplied and brought peasants into unfamiliar surroundings.

Scholastics resolved the supernatural imaginings into realities which the Church was quick to grasp as the cause of mankind's ills. They organized the ancient myths into a vast system of demonology. They provided the facts for distribution to the masses to accept with fear and trembling.

Thirteenth century Europe was possessed with uncertainty and fear in all directions as a result of such numerous changes. Previous studies have placed the blame for witchcraft on many sources; the Inquisition, Catholicism, heresy or merely the credulous medieval mentality. It is the contention of this study that witchcraft grew from none to these sources.

The thirteenth century was extremely unstable internally and this internal instability instilled fear of pathological proportions in most individuals. The witch was the scapegoat who resolved the questions arising in such a rapidly changing society. The development of fearsome uncertainty in the thirteenth century grew from the religious, intellectual, social and economic changes within that time. These changes in turn produced a unique social phenomenon, thirteenth century witchcraft.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WITCHCRAFT

"

IN THE THIRTEENTH

CENTURY

by

Janet F. Decker

"

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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J.F.D.

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PREFACE

As with any subject which reaches back to primitive man and evolves through thousands of years, witchcraft has interested many reknowned historians, anthropologists, and folklorists. A brief survey of the historiography of witchcraft literature reflects both the pet theories of certain writers and the fluctuation of social beliefs.

Elliot Rose, in A Razor For a Goat, cleverly applies Occam's razor to many of the nineteenth and twentieth century works on witchcraft. He catagorizes the works and authors as belonging to one of five distinctly different groups: the bluff school, the "knowing"¹ school, the Anti-Sadducees, the Murrayites, and the rationalists. Although no category entirely suits all authors, some of whom have characteristics of several schools, his divisions provide a useful, if somewhat superficial guideline.

The bluff or "fiddlesticks" school dismisses the whole witchcraft phenomena as just another benighted delusion of the credulous Middle Ages. Henry Charles Lea belongs in this category along with other lesser writers who saw witchcraft only as the invention of a misguided religion. In his monumental History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages Lea credits the witchcraft scares entirely to the Church and the Inquisition, treating all other influences as extraneous² circumstances having small effect. Throughout his life Lea had

collected notes on witchcraft which were published posthumously as Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft. This collection of notes, with minimal analyses by the collector, is a vast repository of classical, early and late medieval witchcraft sources.³ Jeffrey Burton Russell, a rationalist to be discussed later, summarily dismisses Lea's work because of its lack of interpretive analysis.⁴ It is inconceivable that having collected such a sub-stratum of witch beliefs that Lea, had he lived to do so, would not have somewhat modified his earlier theory regarding witchcraft.

The "knowing" school can be dismissed with one word, sensationalism. The works of such authors filled the near vacuum created by the Victorian aversion to pornography and this school of supernatural literature need not be considered in any serious discussion of the subject of witchcraft.

The Anti-Saducee type has one advocate who far outshines all others,⁵ the Reverend Montague Summers. He claimed to be an ordained Catholic priest although so far as can be ascertained the Church does not claim him. He wrote several remarkably scholarly, if at times inaccurate, books on witchcraft, all with impressive bibliographies. Impressive also was his knowledge of witchcraft and the Devil. His attitude toward his subject was as credulous as any medieval true believer. Witches, for him, were the real manifestations of the Devil's work on earth, a perversion of Christianity closely related to heresy.⁶

Murrayites, as the name implies are the disciples of Dr. Margaret Murray, whose first book, The Witchcraft Cult in Western Europe,⁷ created quite a stir in anthropological circles; a stir which was considerably stilled by her second publication, The God of the Witches.⁸ Her first work established the theory that medieval witchcraft was simply the remnants of an ancient fertility cult which the Church was compelled to destroy for its own preservation. Murray's theory is an attractive one which would seem in keeping with modern anthropological studies of primitive societies. However, when she set out to establish her theories in fact she made some unforgivable errors, especially in her second work. Her sources were derived from trial records in England and Scotland only and her conclusions applied willy-nilly to the rest of Europe. Much of her information was gleaned from the pamphleteers' and witchhunters' advertisements which would naturally be prejudiced. However, her worst flaw was in endeavoring to make the theory fit the crime. In an attempt to reconstruct the death cycle requisite of the fertility god she rearranged numerous dates to suit her needs. According to Jeffrey Burton Russell, "those that knew her were convinced of her sanity, if not of her accuracy."⁹ In all fairness Ms. Murray contributed several intriguing ideas and insights into the similarity between the fertility rituals and later witchcraft practices.

The last group of writers will of necessity be grouped into the Rationalist school although their approaches and theories do not necessarily coincide. They are together as a result of negative grouping: they are not members of any of the previously mentioned groups. Most do

share a post-Freudian approach which de-emphasizes the institutional repression of the Church and focuses on an understanding of the psychological reasons for the behavior of both the witches and their persecutors.¹⁰ All stress a psychological, social, economical, or geographical origin of witchcraft, an attitude expected in a scientific, non-religious-oriented age. All are twentieth century writers, each with his own particular well-documented theory exclusive of all others.

Some have suggested that witchcraft and heresy both were manifestations of popular discontent with the ruling class of society. Social pressure and hatred of some elements of society are for H.R. Trevor-Roper the causative forces, proved by the geographical distribution of witchcraft mania.¹¹

The two most recent writers on witchcraft both base their theories on social protest but aim this protest at different targets. Jeffrey Burton Russell's Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, as one might expect from such an authority on heresy and Church reform, contends that the roots of medieval witchcraft lay in heresy and that witchcraft was the inevitable result of the Church's repressive tactics against this heresy.¹² Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters have compiled a collection of source materials entitled Witchcraft. In the authors' preface to this work it is stated that witchcraft is a much more complex phenomenon than at first perceived. These two editors suggest that witchcraft be studied in the light of social, intellectual and legal phenomena and their choice of selections was made with such an endeavor in mind.¹³

The foregoing sketch of witchcraft literature merely touches the surface of the huge amount of material on the subject and includes only the extreme or most influential views on the matter. Each writer had scores of disciples who elaborated on the concepts of their masters. Any study of the subject, however, points out a most significant trend: the transition from the nineteenth century liberal view that witchcraft was primarily a delusion created by the Church, to the twentieth century attitude that witchcraft should be studied as a social phenomenon not isolated in the Middle Ages.¹⁴ Ernest Jones, the reknowned biographer of Sigmund Freud, equates witchcraft persecution with Nazi persecution of the Jews, the Ku Klux Klan, Communist plot fears, Waspish groups in general, and even flying saucer scares.¹⁵ Indeed the witch persecutors and the average medieval men without whom the witches would never have achieved such prominence bear as close scrutiny as the witches themselves. That so many people lived in such unfounded fear for four hundred years is a marvel that has revelance for all times and places.

PREFACE

FOOTNOTES

¹Elliot Rose, A Razor For a Goat (Toronto, Canada, 1962), p. 8.

²Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, 3 Vols. (N. Y., 1901).

³Henry Charles Lea, Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft, 2 Vols. (N. Y., 1957).

⁴Jeffrey Burton Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages (Ithaca, N. Y., 1972), p. 31.

⁵Montague Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology (N. Y., 1926).

⁶Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 31.

⁷Margaret Murray, The Witch Cult in Western Europe, (Oxford Clarenton Press, 1921).

⁸Margaret Murray, The God of the Witches (London, 1933).

⁹Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 36.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 38.

¹¹H. R. Trevor-Roper, "Witches and Witchcraft," Encounter, (Vol. 28 May 13, 1967), pp. 3-25.

¹²Ibid., p. 2.

¹³Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, eds., Witchcraft (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 6.

¹⁴E. G. Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African (London, 1951), p. 15.

¹⁵Ernest Jones, Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis (London, 1951), p. 15.

INTRODUCTION

On the evening of October 30, 1938 thousands of Americans became panic-stricken by a broadcast which described a Martian invasion¹ that threatened our whole civilization. It seems incredible that in the twentieth century men and women could become hysterical to the point of desperation as a result of a radio drama, yet it most certainly happened. Hadley Cantril, in his study of the phenomenon, cited several reasons why so many people believed the impossible: it seemed possible; the authority of the source; the prestige of other believers; no one offered a more acceptable belief; a general atmosphere of acceptance, and a lack of real facts.²

In the Middle Ages exactly the same reasons for credulity may be appropriately applied to the hysterical fear of witches and witchcraft. Moreover, medieval man lived in an exceptionally credulous environment, abounding in inexplicable phenomena. The answer to all questions involved religion or the supernatural. Since Augustine everything upon, below and above the earth was explained by the logos of God. Medieval naivete accepted theological explanations primarily because these were the only explanations available. Medieval man was basically an organizer, a builder of systems. He organized the art of war into a code of chivalry and sexual passion into the art of courtly love,³ So, too, did he codify the old pagan religious survivals, mythological characters, biblical personages,

and many old wife's tales into a cult of witchcraft. One of the major legacies of the thirteenth century was the evolution and clarification of the witch, the detailed enumeration of her attributes, and the methods of combating her evil intentions.

There have always been witches and there still are. Until the thirteenth century, however, witches were allowed freedom to do just about whatever they wished unless in so doing they committed a crime against the state. They were avoided, as were sorcerers and magicians simply because their powers were feared. During the thirteenth century they were persecuted in increasing numbers by the Church, the State, and their own neighbors as dreadful beings not worthy of life. In a relatively short time they had, in the eyes of the world, evolved from feared and avoided members of the community to people so terrifying that they had to be eliminated at all costs. By the end of the thirteenth century a philosophy towards witches had been established which would last for four hundred years.

INTRODUCTION

FOOTNOTES

¹Hadley Cantril, The Invasion From Mars (Princeton, 1940),
p. vii.

²Ibid.

³C.S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge, Mass., 1964),
p. 10.

CHAPTER I
PRIMITIVE AND ANCIENT WITCHCRAFT

Mankind has always sought the rules whereby the laws of nature could be supplicated or coerced into doing his bidding or fulfilling his desires. In so doing he has collected a vast quantity of maxims both true and false. The rules which apply successfully or accurately we call science; the false are deemed¹ magic. But both science and magic presume that there are natural forces at work which are waiting to be understood. The scientist considers these laws immutable. The magician agrees that the natural laws exist but insists they are subject to influence by outside factors, properly controlled. Thus science and magic stand in direct contrast to religion. Theologically, natural law is merely another name for divine organization, changeable only at a god's discretion. Although religion comes close to the witches' claim to the ability to alter the course of nature the methods of doing so differ. Religion propitiates the gods, magic coerces them. This conflict of method partially explains the antipathy between the witch and the priest, especially the Christian one. Both magic and religion evolved among primitive peoples almost simultaneously, often overlapping and amalgamating.

In early ages there was no demarcation between religion and magic. Religion was largely magic, for all religion was directed toward communication with

the divine agencies toward a degree of co-operation for the advantage of man.²

Religious systems differ from one area to another and from one time to another, while the practices of witchcraft or magic remain remarkably the same. Primitive magic pursues universal aims, all connected with the obvious needs and desires of all humanity: worldly success, health, love, sex, fertility of crops, the propagation of animals and man, and escape from the fear of death. It was towards these ends that witches of all early cultures devoted their rituals and fashioned their charms.³ It was realized early that the ability to create fertility, love, health and perhaps immortality could as easily be employed to create barrenness, hate, sickness and death. The magician, sorcerer, or witch was treated therefore with respect tinged with fear by his or her primitive patrons.

Early man worshipped or feared almost everything he could see and many things which he could not. He attributed to all things the existence of a spirit or primitive soul which could be influenced by the proper ritual.⁴ It was to these spirits that both the witches and the religious leaders turned whenever the need arose. These primitive spirits were not gods but rather departmentalized guardians of nature,⁵ each with his own sphere of influence.

Of prime concern to mankind was the assurance of fertility, both animal and vegetable. Logically, the spirits concerned with the abundance of crops and the procreation of animals and man were the first to evolve. The animism of the primitive mind attributed humanlike stimulus and response reactions to plants and animals,

therefore elaborate rituals were evolved to encourage all to increase and be fruitful. Coinciding with the fertility rituals evolved rules and formulae for evoking occurrences propitious for the health of living things: sunshine, sufficient rainfall, and warm winds. Similarly, all adverse conditions could hopefully be avoided by the proper procedures.

Since most primitive societies were primarily agrarian and the farming duties frequently the responsibility of the woman, she was the usual choice to carry out the magical-religious protective rituals. She too bore and cared for the young and acted as physician and midwife to the members of her family or tribe. She, therefore, was the skilled "medicine man" or witch, and her knowledge of weather, growth, propagation, childbirth and medicine were both needed and respected. These skills were handed down through countless generations, often long after the religions associated with them were superseded by newer theological theories.

Remaining also throughout the centuries were the spirits themselves whose presences were acknowledged by the savage and reaffirmed by successive civilizations. As a general rule of thumb it could be said that beneficent occurrences tended to be reckoned as the workings of a benevolent god, whereas the misfortunes and evils that befell mankind were blamed on some demon or devil with evil intentions. The mischievous or even evil demons who satisfied man's need to affix blame for disaster remained constant while scores of different benevolent spirits became gods, rising and falling along with the civilizations which worshipped them.

The evolution of kindly spirits into anthropomorphic gods was a slow process with only a few such spirits in a given culture attaining the status of gods, while the remaining retained their more ephemeral forms. Just when this transition took place on the European continent is uncertain. Perhaps when man perceived his lack of success in controlling nature he accepted such supernatural people, who, having a more human appearance might also have a more human viewpoint and therefore prove more useful in aiding mankind.⁹

The precise deities which were to later influence witchcraft beliefs have long been a source of contention among historians, folk-¹⁰lorists and anthropologists. The two most prominent and most obvious were the Greco-Roman deities Diana and Dionysus. Diana, conceived as the moon, goddess of childbirth, was, in general, a goddess of nature and in particular, the goddess of fertility.¹¹

Yearly rites were performed to ensure the fertility of the crops through a mock marriage of the gods. The antiquity of these performances is suggested by Ovid in Fasti, iv, and Pliny in Natural History, xii.¹² These fertility marriages are of prime importance to later witchcraft allegations of immorality. Evidently the marriage was not a symbolic one to commemorate the coming fertility of spring but a pragmatic performance to charm all living things into renewed growth. The more realistic the performance, the more effective the charm.

Accordingly we may assume with a high degree of probability that the profligacy which notoriously attended these ceremonies was at one time not an accidental excess but an essential part of the rites, and that in the

opinion of those who performed them the marriage of trees and plants could not be fertile without the real union of the human sexes.¹³

The licentiousness attributed to these spring festivals would later be one of the main accusations leveled at the early Christians, heretics and witches. Remnants of the spring festivals may be seen today in modern May Day celebrations, May Queens, May Pole dances, and May garlands and baskets.¹⁴

Dionysus, as a god of agriculture, trees and corn, was annually honored with a ritual representing his death and resurrection. That he held a major place in the fertility rituals is clear from his usual representation as either a horned bull or goat, both symbols of sexual potency.¹⁵

As a goat he can hardly be separated from the minor divinities, the Pans, Satyrs, and Silenuses, all of whom are closely associated with him and are represented more or less completely in the form of goats. Thus Pan was regularly portrayed in sculpture and painting with the face and legs of a goat.¹⁶

To the primitive mind this representation of a male fertility spirit was both widespread and natural. To the medieval mind searching for a personification of a male spirit who tempted mankind to sin (often sexually) it was equally natural that the medieval Devil strongly resembled the ancient Dionysus.

Classical literature abounds with references to witches, their charms, and their powers. Everyone is familiar with Homer's Circe who changed the men of wily Ulysses into pigs.¹⁷ Petronius, in the Satyricon, so adroitly describes the town witch who dabbles in prostitution on the side that one feels she must surely have been a personal acquaintance.¹⁸ Procopius in the Secret History attributes

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all manner of witchcraft to the Empress Theodora.

One of the favorite tales in the Middle Ages was Apuleius' The Golden Ass, in which the witch manifested most of the attributes of her later counterparts. After anointing herself with a special ointment Apuleius' witch was transformed into a bird and flew away. The hero, wishing to duplicate this feat, procured the wrong salve²⁰ and found himself transformed, not into a bird, but an ass.

Numerous passages exist concerning incantations and image magic used especially in the preparation of love potions. The most charming is Theocritus' second Idyll in which the young lady contrives to restore the affection of her lost lover. Here both the efficacy of the proper incantation and the use of an image including bits of clothing belonging to her lover are employed. As the image²¹ burns so too should the young man burn with desire for the witch.

The most influential of all classical writers was Virgil. Every medieval schoolboy studied his Virgil and struggled with Latin composition modeled on Virgilian poetry. The Aeneid, itself a study in classical superstitions, contains far too many references to the supernatural to attempt quotation. That everyone who could write at all during the Middle Ages knew his Virgil is apparent from the²² numerous quotations repeated verbatim from the Aeneid. Religious writers were fond of lifting whole sentences, incorporating them rhetorically into their sermons and letters. They can usually be detected simply by the quality of the Latin. However, the medieval monk realized the peril inherent in such a heathen work as the

Aeneid as evidenced by the following true story told by St. Hugh of Cluny:

Once, when the holy Father was asleep, he dreamed that a multitude of serpents and wild beasts lay beneath his head; wherefore, having shaken his pillow, he found a volume of Virgil lying by chance beneath it. Then casting aside this secular volume, he slept in peace, and saw how closely the matter of the book agreed with his vision--a book filled with obscenities and heathen rites, and unworthy to be laid among the bedclothes of a holy man.²³

One cannot help but wonder by what chance a volume of Virgil happened to be placed under the papal pillow.

A brief word is necessary concerning the term used in Latin to signify the witch. The Latin word used by most writers was sagae,²⁴ a feminine noun designating the conventional witch of their day.

Cicero derives the noun from the verb sagire meaning sentire acute. He says that old women were called sagae because they claimed to know²⁵ many things.

It is clear that before the advent of Christianity the attributes of the medieval witch as we know her were established. She lacked only the Devil as her lord and master. With the advent of Christianity and its spread all over Western Europe the Judeo-Christian mythology supplied the missing master, the Devil, by far the most important facet of medieval witchcraft. When the Devil appeared in Europe, witchcraft began its evolution into the most heinous crime of all. However, the Devil could not function properly without his host of demons and human helpmates. Slowly, over the next twelve hundred years the Devil acquired his advocates, the witches.

CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES

- ¹J.B. Frazer, The Magic Art, Vol. I (N. Y., 1951), p. 222.
- ²Harvey E. Wedeck, Treasury of Witchcraft (N. Y., 1951), p. 5.
- ³Frazer, The Magic Art, Vol. I, p. 330.
- ⁴Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo (N. Y., 1918), p. 130.
- ⁵Frazer, The Magic Art, Vol. I, p. 374.
- ⁶Pennethorne Hughes, Witchcraft (N. Y., 1952), p. 15.
- ⁷Jules Michelet, Satanism and Witchcraft (N. Y., 1939), p. 343.
- ⁸Raoul Scipion Allier, The Mind of the Savage (N.Y., 1927),
p. 139.
- ⁹Frazer, The Magic Art, Vol. I, p. 233.
- ¹⁰Alan Kors and Edward Peters, eds., Witchcraft (Philadelphia,
1972), p. 4.
- ¹¹Frazer, The Magic Art, Vol. II, p. 128.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 97.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 128.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 59.
- ¹⁵J. G. Frazer, Spirits of Corn and Wild (N. Y., 1951), p. 16.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 1.
- ¹⁷Homer, Iliad.
- ¹⁸Petronius, Satyricon.

¹⁹Procopius, Secret History.

²⁰Apuleius, The Golden Ass.

²¹Theocritus, Idyll, ii.

²²G.G. Coulton, Life in the Middle Ages (N. Y., 1930), p. 18,
p. 64.

²³Ibid., p. 104.

²⁴E.E. Buriss, "Terminology of Witchcraft," Classical Philology,
(Vol. 31, April 1936), pp. 137-145.

²⁵Ibid., p. 138.

CHAPTER II

JUDEO-EARLY CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTIONS

There is no evidence whatever to link the medieval witch to a Hebrew counterpart. The Devil whom the witch worshipped did not¹ exist in Hebrew tradition. It has already been noted that the personification of the Devil owed much to the Greco-Roman Dionysius and the ancient horned fertility god tradition. Jewish history added several other ideas, some of which were included in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

In the Jewish book of Enoch reference is made to Lucifer, the angel of light, who led a revolt against God. In another version an Archangel named Satanail, who thought himself equal to God, was thrown² out of heaven, and sought revenge by tempting Adam and Eve. The story of the Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis in the Old Testament established Satan, in the form of a serpent, successfully tempting Eve and thus blighting humanity with original sin and consequently subject-³ing mankind to the machinations of the Devil forever.

Jewish magic, an outgrowth of Persian and Babylonian sources, although occasionally used for evil intentions, most often dealt with prophecy and divination. Every Old Testament passage dealing with magic or witchcraft was really concerned with Divination, although⁴ later translations did not always give that impression.

The most famous instance of the role which semantics played in the history of witchcraft is found in Exodus xii, 18, "Thou shalt

not suffer a witch to live." ⁵ The Rheims-Douay translation has
 "Wizards thou shalt not suffer to live." ⁶ Hebrew wizards were masters
 of fortelling or divining but there is no indication that they possessed any of the attributes of the medieval or modern witch. In the Revised Version the original Hebrew word is translated "sorceress," quite different from the connotation of "witch." The Hebrew word, rendered so variously is "kashaph," a word unfortunately of unclear meaning. It occurs twelve times and its meaning can only be guessed at by the manner in which it is used. The most frequent references imply "to cut oneself" as in the priestly dances of Baal; "to obscure," ⁷ from an Arabic root; and "poisoner." ⁸

The second most influential Old Testament reference to witchcraft concerns the so-called Witch of Endor. However, in the entire Chapter 28 of Samuel I in the old Douay version there is no inference that this woman could do more than raise the spirits of the dead. Her talent was much more in the province of the spiritual medium than the witch. When confronted by Saul's request she tried to avoid answering him, reminding the disguised king that magicians and soothsayers had been expelled from the land. Only upon his reassurance of her safety ⁸ did she agree to call forth the spirit of Saul.

Although the Old Testament added little to the folklore of witchcraft, the Hebrew ancient beliefs contained vampires, demons, and spirits similar to ancient western beliefs. The story of Lilith, in Hebrew tradition the first wife of Adam, had lasting import for later witchcraft theories. Lilith and Adam separated due to

incompatibility, and Lilith spent the remainder of her existence tormenting Adam and the rest of mankind. She was a creature of the night who possessed the ability to transport herself through
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 the air.

Christianity was a synthesis of many of the pre-existing Hebrew ideas and numerous eastern religious theories. It did not spring up as a simple revealed religion, but rather evolved from the various beliefs of numerous sects. Such beliefs frequently long outlived the groups which conceived them.

One of the earliest heretical sects which has never completely died out, was Gnosticism. The Gnostics combined the teachings of
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 Christ, oriental philosophy and Zoroasterism. Their chief contributions to eventual witchcraft theology concerned the existence of the two principles, good and evil, and the composition of the invisible world. The first of these, the theory of dualism, will be considered later in regard to the Manicheans, its chief proponents. In the realm of invisible phenomena the Gnostics agreed with the orthodox Christians that the invisible world related directly to pagan idolatry, and that demons were the authors, patrons and the objects of that idolatry.

Those rebellious spirits who had been degraded from the rank of angels, and cast down into the infernal pit, were still permitted to roam upon earth, to torment the bodies and to seduce the minds of sinful men. The demons soon discovered and abused the natural propensity of the human heart towards devotion, and, artfully withdrawing the adoration of mankind from their Creator, they usurped the place and honors of the Supreme Deity.¹²

It was supposed, or imagined, by the orthodox that the gods of polytheism were just such demons, therefore any reference to a pagan deity was, in the eyes of the Church, a reference to a demon. Nevertheless, along with their new religion, early Christians continued to practice their ancient superstitions in more or less disguised form. Early martyrs, later saints, replaced the ancient spirits and gods in magical ritual. In its efforts to destroy paganism the Church inadvertently advanced the cause of witchcraft. By convincing those who remained attached to the old gods that they were still worshipping demons the Church lent a practical reality to the worship of evil.¹³

In the first several centuries of Christianity, paganism was attacked both openly and subtly. The most successful approach proved to be the subtle one of assimilation, as polytheistic rites were mingled with Christian ceremonies. The people on whom a new culture was being imposed simply transferred under new names the religious customs which were a part of the ancient observances.

The processions led by priests and augurs for the prosperity of the vineyards and plantations for the welfare of the people were consecrated in the new form of the Rogations. Holy Water has replaced the lustral bowl; the talisman has become the Agnus Dei. The Hebrew names of God and the angels, together with those of Abraham and Solomon, were substituted for those of the Greek and oriental deities, who figured on the phylacteries and talismans. The Fates were no longer invoked as at Preneste: instead, the Bible was consulted at random and prognostications discovered in the meaning of the first words at the top of a page.¹⁴

For hundreds of years the struggle of orthodox Christianity against paganism and heretical sects continued without respite. Eventually the religions and sects which competed with Christianity

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all but disappeared or went underground. One such sect, the Manicheans, an outgrowth of Gnosticism had a twofold influence on future witchcraft. First, it elaborated on the Gnostic teaching of the existence of the two principles co-equal in this world, good and evil. Second, the Manichean heresy brought forth the genius of Augustine who chose to refute their beliefs.

Manichean dualism was based on the theory that there exist two equal forces, God and Satan, of whom the former created the invisible, spiritual, and eternal universe; the latter the material and temporal, which he governs. ¹⁶ It was inevitable that the Manicheans should be accused of worshipping the Devil, since it was to the evil principle that all requests concerning temporal matters were addressed. Since God was concerned with spiritual matters only, the farmer, for instance, could not pray to God for a plentiful harvest, but was forced to pray to Satan who, as temporal master, concerned himself ¹⁷ with the propagation of crops.

By the fourth century, when St. Augustine was drawn to discuss the problem of the source and nature of evil by his dispute with the Manicheans, the concept of the Devil as the enemy of God and man was firmly established in Christian beliefs. St. Augustine systematized this concept and placed it in a meaningful context.

By stressing to so great a degree the climactic effects of the fall from Eden and the continuing efforts of Satan to prey upon sinful human nature for the perdition of souls, he heightened the Christian awareness of the Devil's powers so that they seemed second only to those of God.¹⁸

Henceforth, whenever theologians sought sources to reinforce later dogma Augustine provided an inexhaustable supply. Augustine

placed Satan firmly as the head god of a hierarchy of evil spirits, working for the temporal and eternal suffering of mankind through the inscrutable will of God. Although the dualism of the Manicheans had been dogmatically defeated, the influence of these and similar dualist beliefs, particularly as they contributed to emphasizing Satan's temporal role, were to remain a part of Christian doctrine for many centuries. Satan's position as commander-in-chief of an army of subordinate devils and human camp followers was an essential part of early medieval folklore; it would later become increasingly¹⁹ an essential part of official witchcraft dogma.

CHAPTER II

FOOTNOTES

¹Henry Charles Lea, Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft, Vol. I., (N. Y., 1957), p. 106.

²Frank Donovan, Never On a Broomstick (Harrisburg, Pa., 1971), p. 122.

³The Holy Bible, Rheims-Douay Version, Genesis iii.

⁴Jeffrey Burton Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages (Ithaca, N. Y., 1972), p. 54.

⁵The Holy Bible, King James Version, Exodus xii, 18.

⁶The Holy Bible, Rheims-Douay Version, Exodus xii, 18.

⁷E. G. Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African (London, 1963), p. 120.

⁸The Holy Bible, Rheims-Douay Version, Samuel I, xxviii.

⁹Parrinder, Witchcraft: European and African, p. 120.

¹⁰Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (N. Y., 1963), p. 91.

¹¹Ibid., p. 92.

¹²Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 46.

¹³Christian Pitois, The History and Practice of Magic (N.Y., 1969), p. 274.

¹⁴Ferdinand Lot, The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages (N. Y., 1961), p. 391.

¹⁵Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, Vol. I (N. Y., 1901), p. 91.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁷Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, eds., Witchcraft (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 7.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 7.

CHAPTER III

MEDIEVAL WITCHCRAFT BEFORE 1200 A.D.

An attitude of the Middle Ages which parallels the credulity in witchcraft is the all pervasive belief in the miraculous. From eighth century Bede on through the innumerable saints' lives, contemporary literature credited every village and hamlet with miraculous happenings. These miracles are so closely related to the phenomena which witches accomplished that but for their authors' reputations it is difficult to differentiate them. Both saint and witch often accomplished the same ends although their sources of power differed as did, possibly, their motives. But the same credulous nature necessary to the belief in the miracle was needed to accept the reality of the witches' evil deed or maleficium.

When Christianity began it was deemed totally beyond human reason by the Church fathers. It was considered presumptuous, even sinful, to question any phenomena which had a sanctified supernatural origin. Miracles of every order abounded in every area. They excited no skepticism, only awe. "The demand for miracles was almost bound-¹less, and the supply was equal to the demand."

The sense of wonder lived among the people in their everyday life. They believed the old stories of supernatural heroes and the newer stories of saintly men. Therefore the Church was faced with the dilemma of specifying which occurrences were pagan superstition

and which were Christian reality; which performers were demoniacal heroes, which were inspired saints. The Church usually solved this problem by assimilating the old heroes and magical elements whenever possible. The whole cult of wonder readjusted, renamed, and embraced many of the surviving pagan miracles and deities, much to everyone's confusion. The ancient shrines were turned into saint's shrines, names changed and rituals altered. Just which spirits the parishioners evoked when kneeling before these ancient holy places, cannot be known. Most probably, due to human expediency, both pagan² and Christian gods were addressed.

Attempting to fill in the voids left in the ritualistic necessities of medieval life when pagan deities were displaced, the church increasingly became the repository of supernatural power. The mass especially was filled with magical elements as it drifted surely away from the concept of the communion of the faithful to a ceremony of consecration through the magical words of the priest. Although the Church never claimed any magical power per se, the people did not make the finer theological distinction between priestly magic and divine inspiration. Through its encouragement of rote prayer by repetition in an unknown language the Church did much to destroy popular understanding of the difference between charms and prayers. Many of the purposes served by paganism were now looked for in Christianity. The Church disapproved the increase in superstition within its ranks but was reluctant to discourage attitudes that fostered popular devotion.³

The most outstanding attempt to discourage pagan superstition and to clarify the Church's position in regard to witchcraft was the so-called Canon Episcopi. The origin and date of this document are somewhat controversial but it was reproduced in the tenth century penitential, the Corector, and again in the Decretum of Burchard of Worms, since which time it was received as authoritative by canon lawyers⁴ and theologians. Although it treated witchcraft as a delusion, a tenet not long held by the Church, this document is important for what it tells us about ninth and tenth century beliefs and for its tremendous influence on the Middle Ages. The Canon is itself a reply addressed to the bishops concerning information which had recently come to the attention of the Church hierarchy. The following excerpt consists only of those parts of the Canon which deal with contemporary tenth century witchcraft beliefs or beliefs which are important to later witchcraft ideas.⁵

There are some wicked women, tricked by the Devil, seduced by delusions and apparitions of demons, who believe and claim that they at night with Diana the pagan goddess and a large group of women, ride upon certain beasts, and in the silence of the night, cross over great expanses of land, obeying Diana's commands as though she were their mistress, being summoned to her service on certain nights...Thus, too, Satan himself, transformed into an angel of light, when he has seized the mind of a pitiful woman and subjugated her to him through infidelity and incredulity, does transform himself into the shapes and appearances of various persons; and deluding, as in a dream the mind which he holds captive, and pointing out scenes both happy and sad, and persons both known and unknown, he leads her through devious paths; and while only the spirit alone experiences these things the faithless mind believes it to have happened not just in spirit but also in body.⁶

It must be kept in mind that, although the writer of the Canon and the Church itself did not believe that the occurrences mentioned really happened, the parishioners for whom the Canon was written did so believe. At least such beliefs were widespread enough for them to warrant an official rebuttal. Unlike some later witchcraft beliefs these could not have been the result of an overzealous inquisitorial imagination.⁷ Thus did the Church inadvertently disseminate throughout all Christendom the majority of ideas of witchcraft. The Canon contained the essential medieval concepts of witchcraft as they were held until the thirteenth century; allegiance with Diana, a pagan goddess equated with a demon; flight through the air over vast distances; summoned meetings on specified nights; the presence of the Devil himself, in the guise of Lucifer, literally the lightbearer, the angel of light; subjugation by the Devil through infidelity, an expression later to have purely sexual connotations; the ability of the Devil to assume various likenesses: and visions of happenings and people far removed in distance.

It is noteworthy that nowhere in the Canon is there any mention of maleficium or harmful magic performed by these night-riding women. Maleficium, a clearly separate deed, had always been punished by secular authorities. Under Roman law it had been a capital crime.⁸ Witchcraft, until the thirteenth century, had been consistently treated by the Church merely as the spiritual crime of apostasy. The punishment for apostasy and/or the adherence to pagan religions was banishment from the Church.⁹

But in the thirteenth century witchcraft became fused with heresy, and heresy implied maleficium of the worst sort. Once joined in popular and theological imagination to the heretic the witch was no longer just a strange person, avoided except when needed or when she committed a provable criminal act against her fellow man. Henceforth, as heretic and witch combined she was a member of an international movement, a powerful subversive force working secretly night and day to overthrow the true religion and to prevent the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.¹⁰

CHAPTER III

FOOTNOTES

¹W.H.E. Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe (N.Y., 1955), p. 157.

²Charles Grant Loomis, White Magic (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), p. 8.

³Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (N. Y., 1971), p. 49.

⁴Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 77.

⁵All translations, unless otherwise noted, are those of the author.

⁶Burton, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 292.

... quod quaedam sceleratae mulieres retro post Satanam conversae, daemonum illusionibus et phantasmatis seductae, credunt se et profitentur nocturnis horis cum Diana paganorum dea et innumera multitudine mulierum equitare super quasdam bestias, et multa terrarum spatia intempestate noctis silentio pertransire, eiusque viisionibus velut dominae obedire, et certis noctibus id eius servitium evocari... sequidem ipse Satanas, qui transfigurat se in angelum lucis, cum mentem cuiuscunque mulierculae ceperit et hanc sibi per infidelitatem et incredulitatem subiugaverit, illico transformat se in diversarum personarum species atque similitudines, et mentem, quam captivam tenet, in somnis deludens, modo laeta, modo tristia, modo cognita, modo incognita, personas ostendens, per divia quaeque deducit, et cum solus eius spiritus hoc patitur, infidelis mens haec not in animo, sed in corpore.

⁷K. M. Briggs, Pale Hecate's Team (London, 1962), p. 5.

⁸H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684 (Stanford, Calif., 1972), p. 17.

⁹Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰R.H. Robbins, "Heresy of Witchcraft," South Atlantic Quarterly (Vol. 65, August 1966), pp. 532-43.

CHAPTER IV
THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY CHURCH

The thirteenth century at its beginning witnessed the supreme effort of the Roman Catholic Church to influence and control the whole of society in all its facets. Regardless of one's station in life he could not properly be born, grow to manhood, marry, transact business, enter into legal contracts, become ill or finally die without the aid or interference of the Church. Even after death he could not rest in peace had he neglected beforehand to arrange for prayers to be said after his death and had he not left a portion of¹ his belongings to the Church.

In a period when faith alone was the determining factor of conduct, the sole possession of salvation maintained by the Church created an unprecedented despotism in the hands of the priests who administered such salvation. This could be accomplished only by an extremely well organized hierarchy which had gradually evolved throughout twelve hundred years. Such great authority is an immense tribute to the triumph of the intellect over brute strength, power which was wrested from fierce warriors in an age of warfare and battle, by priests who had originally no force at their command, and whose enormous² influence was based on their control of the souls of mankind.

In the struggle to achieve ascendancy over all the affairs of humanity the Church had lost practically all the Christian virtues of

humility and charity which had appealed to so many converts. Christians began to lose their affection for a church which purchased their submission with the promise of salvation through faith and obedience or extorted it by the threat of worldly persecution or the more terrifying threat of eternal damnation.

Practically the whole body of Christians no longer constituted the Church; that body was divided into two essentially distinct classes, the shepherds and the sheep; and the lambs were often apt to think, not unreasonably, that they were tended only to be shorn.³

Rome was far away and of little use to the average person who suffered from the wrongdoings of the parish priest. Should one force a complaint so far as to reach the ears of the bishop it was unlikely that he would receive much sympathy; he was lucky if the offence did not involve a relative of the bishop's or at least someone who had purchased his office at a comely price. At best the complainant might have grown old awaiting his long drawn out trial, forced to pay heavy court costs, only to be dismissed with the suggestion that perhaps some redress of his grievances might be achieved should he see fit to contribute to some current building project.⁴

The list of offences committed by ecclesiastical personnel from Pope to priest has filled volumes. Papal policies seldom set high standards for bishops and priests to follow. Rome was guilty of selling benefices and could accomplish almost any end by the threat of excommunication. The Curia was notorious for dealing in letters of papal authority, abusing their use, selling these valuable letters to the highest bidder; or when letters were scarce even forging them.

Extortion due to the demand for marriage annulments among the affluent and influential was widespread. Priests rarely delivered sermons; tithes were fought over by priest and bishop; marriage and funeral services were an important source of income. The performance of the last rites included harassment for death-bed bequests or after-death payments for lessening purgatorial duration. The parish priest had only a small income for his living expenses but it would seem that⁵ the opportunities for adding to one's income were innumerable.

Celibacy was not a particularly popular condition among the clergy. Many priests openly kept mistresses while others were known to have propositioned parishioners while cloistered in the confessional. A sermon which condemned one to hell for a little adultery was not very effective among listeners, when the true vocation of the priest's "housekeeper" was community knowledge. Especially odious under these circumstances was the fact that all sexual sins were increasingly preached as deadly mortal sins and as such were especially favored⁶ and encouraged by the Devil.

Practically every religious article imaginable was peddled by priests or someone pretending to the priesthood. Even bishops outbid one another for relics, more often than not, spurious ones. Relics of saints were bought and transferred from one parish to another; those not for sale could usually be stolen. Often several churches claimed possession of the identical portion of the anatomy of the same saint. Holy water was sold as a cure for all sorts of ills; its value depending on which saint supposedly blessed it. The selling

of indulgences was so famous that many people still believe that indulgences solely caused the Reformation and the Thirty Year's War. Magic formulae, usually exerpts from the Mass in very bad Latin, could be purchased, complete with added specific incantations. Caesarius of Heisterbac (c.1220) told of a special wax figurine, which represented an enemy who was to be destroyed; when Mass was celebrated ten times over such an image the enemy's death was insured within ten days.⁷

Relics, talismen, incantations, images and fetichism, in general, as used by the Church differed only slightly from the practices of the women who would be burned as witches by this same Church. The differentiation between the priest's and the witches' efforts at supernatural intervention lay solely in the source of powers to whom each appealed. Since priests presumably had a working agreement with God it was logical that the witches should have some similar arrangement with their highest power, the Devil. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the idea of a pact between witches and the Devil was a vague thing which did not become clarified until⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas undertook the project. The importance of Aquinas and the Scholastics will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

The corruption within the Church cannot be dismissed without some mention of the wandering vagrants whom Helen Waddell has made so famous.⁹ It was the writings and songs of these vagrants which largely informed contemporary society of the conditions existing

within the religious orders. This knowledge contributed greatly to the widespread dissatisfaction with the Roman Church, which in turn led people to seek to purify or change completely their religious life.

The priesthood had been for a long while the only profession into which a person, regardless of his social status, could enter. As a result, there had for several hundred years been more priests than there were positions for them. "The twelfth century with its craze for scholarship and the utter disillusionment that followed it, increased further the wandering population." ¹⁰ By the early thirteenth century the Church Councils refer to these wandering scholar-unemployed priests as an ordo and a secta. ¹¹ All that is left of such an organization is the parodies and songs which remain, for example, in the Carmina Burana. ¹² The Church in exasperation even called in the secular arm of the law to remove such embarrassing pests; they were shaven, their status as priests revoked, some were even imprisoned. The Church, grappling with heretics, had become quite sensitive to criticism, much ecclesiastical dirty linen had been hung out for public exposure; it needed no more publicity from these traveling scholar-poet-priest-troubadours.

They say no harder things than Innocent III said at the Lateran Council in 1215 but they say them in portable form: a folio of parchment is less dangerous than an indecent distich about the morals of the Papal legate sung all over Paris.¹³

Conditions within the Church were well known to most of the Catholic population and resulted in several measures by the Church

and the people themselves: Reformism within the Church; reformist sects on the fringe of the Church; heretical sects separate from the Roman Church; and reversion to older practices termed paganism by some and witchcraft by others. Reformism within the Church was doomed from the start; corruption was too deeply imbedded. Bishop and priest responded to Papal pleas with about as much co-operation as did the plague when the Pope demanded it to cease and desist. The few reforms which were accomplished only encouraged deviations which heretofore had been deemed sinful ipso facto. Prior to this time no changes were sanctioned; no doubts had been permitted before the thirteenth century.

It was firmly believed that anyone who deviated from the strict line of orthodoxy must soon succumb beneath the power of Satan; but as there was no spirit of rebellion or of doubt this persuasion did not produce any extra-ordinary terrorism.¹⁴

The above statement applied before the thirteenth century, after which time a spirit of individualism began to exert itself. There was less obedience to authority on all levels and men began to doubt the truth of what had been told them. "This wide-spread distrust led to a shifting from one authority to another, rather than an entire rejection of all authority."¹⁵ The new authority which many chose was some form of new religious sect. The two most important sects with regard to witchcraft were the Albigensians and the Catharists, called by two names, although they were almost identical. The Albigensians were important for their role in furthering the office of the Inquisition; the Catharists for the influence of their dualistic beliefs which was of prime importance in the merging of heresy and witchcraft.

The Albigensians were called the Catharists of Southern France by their opponents. Unfortunately the only accounts of their doctrines were written by their opponents who stressed the dualistic nature of their beliefs. They believed in a God of good in heaven and a God of evil who ruled on earth; a sort of hell-on-earth philosophy. This particular sect, like all others related to the Catharists, drew much of its doctrine from the much older Manichean heresy of the early Church. The Albigensians were indigenous to southern France, a most civilized portion of Europe; rich, prosperous, and peaceful. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse avoided disturbing the tranquility of the countryside with an attack on the heretics, even after repeated suggestions by the Pope. Finally, in 1209 Pope Innocent III preached a Crusade against the heretics. Led by Simon de Montfort, northern nobles and other zealots invaded southern France. The rich land and plunder available, ancient animosities and political intrigue were among the principal reasons for the Crusade's appeal, along with the same indulgences and papal dispensations granted to the previous Crusaders to the Holy Land. The Albigensians never recovered from the
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onslaught.

The significance for witchcraft of the Albigensian Crusade was the effect which the episode had on the Dominican Order. Sent along with other Mendicant orders to reclaim the heretics without violence they stayed on in an advisory capacity during the Crusade. They were appalled at the inefficiency with which heresy was dealt and besought the Pope for control of an inquisitorial office with the sole duty of

ferreting out heresy. As the Albigensians, like all Catherists were accused of Devil worship the Dominicans "whose wits were first whetted on that heresy, came away from the Crusade obsessed with the problem of Satan."¹⁷ They thought they saw beneath the form of the Albigensian heresy the rudiments of another heresy far more evil.

From an early date, therefore they had pressed the Pope to grant them jurisdiction over witchcraft as well as over recognized theological heresy. To the Dominicans the two forms of error were inseparable: one continued the other, and the pursuit must not cease when the formal error had disappeared underground.¹⁸

The Dominicans persisted both in their pleas to the Pope and in the spreading of their conviction that witches were heretics.

Catharism in general did give the Dominicans some bases for their beliefs. Based on Manichean dualism it did place Satan in a position co-equal with the Christian God in power and made Satan and his power responsible for all temporal matters. As the Roman Catholic Church was of this world, and clearly dominating all things temporal, it was, therefore, the Devil's own institution. The Catharists went far beyond¹⁹ many of the contemporary reformist sects in denouncing the Church.

They held secret meetings which, under the circumstances, seems logical enough. However, as throughout all time, the mere act of secrecy merely whetted the appetite of curiosity and the extremity of speculation. As were the Christian sects of old, the Catharists were accused of the wildest sexual orgies and obscene rites, complete with cauldrons containing the usual preferred mixture of unbaptised infants. Catharists allegedly attended Mass, kept the Host in their²⁰ mouths, later to be defiled in their own rituals to the Devil.

Unfortunately, there was no reason for these stories to be questioned by the general public. Since the Catharists were anti-Catholic and believed that Satan was the ruler of the world to whom they might turn for worldly assistance it was not at all strange that they be termed Devil worshippers. Their major threat to the Church was in the undermining of its omnipotence. Ordinary heretics were burned, whether they worshipped the Devil or not, because they were social deviates. However, there is no evidence that they were particularly terrifying to the Church nor did they inspire terror in their neighbors. It was not until the Dominicans became obsessed with the role of Satan in heretical worship, and included the witch in the definition of heretic was there any extensive fear of the witch. According to Alan Kors:

...the ontological status and purposeful activities of Satan and his host of demons was essential to a changed perception of the witch, whose nature and fate were increasingly linked to those of the diabolical powers.²¹

With magnificent post hoc logic the concept grew that the heretic was a worshiper of the Devil and that since the witch received her powers outside the Church she too was a heretic, ergo, a Devil's tool. The Dominican Order must receive most of the credit for this idea along with the idea that witchcraft must be included among the heresies under the jurisdiction of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. With their constant bombardment of the papal office for such permission they were eventually to be successful. It would be safe to say that no religious order has ever achieved the degree of success

in reaching its goals as was the Dominican Order in its battle against witchcraft. Just who ultimately won the battle is a matter of conjecture. The Religious entered the field as God's martyrs, the witches emerged as martyrs for human freedom.

The Inquisition had originally been established simply to combat heresy.²² Just why witchcraft trials were taken over by the Inquisition has posed an interesting question for some. To most students of the Inquisition the addition of witchcraft cases to the Inquisition's jurisdiction seems a logical one.²³ One scholar of note who raises a dissenting voice is R. H. Robbins who claims that the Inquisition itself invented the heresy of witchcraft. He claims that the Inquisition had been so successful in abolishing ordinary heresy that it had practically put itself out of business; therefore it was forced to find a never ending source of heretics- the witches. Witchcraft was a heresy with so broad a base that the supply would never dry up.²⁴

W.E.H. Lecky viewed the expansion of the Inquisition into the coverage of witchcraft as primarily a political maneuver which extended its jurisdiction.

It is obvious that this organization in addition to its religious importance, had a very great political importance. It transferred to ecclesiastics a branch of jurisdiction which had always been regarded as belonging to the civil power, and it introduced into every country where it was acknowledged, a corporation of extraordinary powers entirely dependent on a foreign potentate.²⁵

It has been noted earlier the degree of interest in witchcraft which was acquired by the Dominican Order during the Albigensian

Crusade. Their requests for permission to take witchcraft trials away from the secular courts which had traditionally tried magic and sorcery cases at first met with little success on the papal level. As late as 1258 a request was made of Pope Alexander IV for permission to include witchcraft among offences of which it could take official cognizance. Permission was denied. However, in the same year in a decretal letter the Pope agreed that the Inquisition could handle witchcraft prosecutions only if there was evidence of manifest heresy in the cases. It was not difficult then to tie together devil-worshipping heretics with devil-worshipping
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witches.

The concept was a neat one; logical and easily convincing. All that was needed was a simple, but careful and irrefutable argument by the Church. Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics provided the theological necessities, society provided its fearful approval, and the witches provided the inevitable scapegoat. The witch, now called heretic, was not invented by anyone, as Robbins or Lecky have thought; she was the logical evolution of the social and economic pressures on a world whose intellect was immersed in an ethos of God, the Devil, and demons. Scholars of any era, in part reflect the manner of thought of their times; in part, they are responsible for the ideas peculiar to their times. By codifying, clarifying and popularizing these ideas they give to them form and credence. To this extent Aquinas and the scholastics of the thirteenth century must share some of the responsibility for the fate of the witches.

CHAPTER IV

FOOTNOTES

¹Frederick Artz, The Mind of the Middle Ages (N.Y., 1966), p. 448.

²Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, Vol. I (N. Y., 1901), p. 1.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴Ibid., p. 51.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch-Hunting in Southwestern Germany (Stanford, Calif., 1972), p. 17.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Helen Waddell, The Wandering Scholars (Garden City, N. Y., 1961), p. 6.

¹¹Ibid., p. 200.

¹²Bischoff Bernhard, Ed., Carmina Burana (Brooklyn, N. Y., 1967).

¹³Waddell, Wandering Scholars, p. 202.

¹⁴W.H.E. Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe (N.Y., 1955), p. 63.

¹⁵A.C. Flick, The Rise of the Medieval Church (N.Y., 1909), p. 570.

¹⁶R.H. Robbins, "Heresy of Witchcraft," Southern Atlantic Quarterly (Vol. 65 August 1966), pp. 532-543.

¹⁷Elliot Rose, A Razor For a Goat, (Toronto, Canada, 1962), p. 166.

¹⁸H.R. Trevor-Roper "Witches and Witchcraft" Encounter (Vol. 28, May 1967), pp. 3-25.

¹⁹Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, Vol. I, p. 89.

²⁰Rose, A Razor For A Goat, p. 90.

²¹Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, Witchcraft (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1972), p. 6.

²²New Catholic Encyclopedia (N.Y., 1967), p. 408.

²³Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, Vol. I, n.p.

²⁴Robbins, R.H., "Heresy of Witchcraft," Southern Atlantic Quarterly (Vol. 65, August 1966), pp. 532-548.

²⁵Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe, p. 112.

²⁶Kors and Peters, Witchcraft, p. 77.

CHAPTER V

THIRTEENTH CENTURY INTELLECTUAL TRENDS

It has been previously stated that medieval man was an organizer and codifier whose penchant for creating systems out of many disorganized facts has never been equalled. Facts, regardless of source, were held in great respect, and anything written in any book automatically became a fact.

They are bookish. They are indeed very credulous of books. They find it hard to believe that anything an old auctor has said is simply untrue. And they inherit a very heterogenous collection of books; Judaic, Pagan, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoical, Primitive Christian, Patristic. Or (by a different classification) chronicals, epic poems, sermons, visions, philosophical treatises, satires. Obviously their auctors will contradict one another. They will seem to do so even more often if you ignore the distinction of kinds and take your science impartially from the poets and philosophers; and this medievals very often did.¹

Nowhere in medieval studies is this amalgamation of fact and fiction more apparent than in the writings dealing with witchcraft. Somehow all the huge amount of knowledge concerning witches and their relationships to theology, law, medicine, and society in general was sorted out, tidied up, and all contradictions resolved.

The basic weakness in medieval reasoning, obviously, was the unquestioned reliance placed upon the so-called authorities. With such naive faith in any source found in written form, the questioning and discovery of misconceptions or errors of earlier authors was unheard of. Also, whole areas of modern thought were unknown to the

scholars of the Middle Ages. It is difficult for modern man to realize the non-existence of our basic concepts of psychology, and the absence of the exact sciences, with only a rather elementary grasp of mathematics. History, as it is now understood, did not exist. Evidence was relatively unimportant; the status of the author determined the credibility of his work. Evidence was never critically evaluated and experience consisted largely of old wives' tales; the marvels of a particular situation were accepted as probable because they resembled² those read about in some authority in the past.

These observations concerning medieval scholarship must be held in mind when one studies the works of such scholars as Thomas Aquinas, who undertook the mammoth task of setting down for posterity man's relationship to the universe and to his God.

Aquinas contemplated in his vast works of theology the long process of summarizing and explicating in infinite detail the character of the relations between man and God, the definition of which had been begun in earnest in the twelfth century. Strongly influenced by both Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas gave a formal structure to Christian philosophy. In his elaborately detailed description of the universe and the powers it contains, he dealt with the problem of evil, with the demons, and with demonic intervention in human affairs.³

Drawing on about everything that had been written, Aquinas blended and wove conclusions which became the dogmatic rule-of-thumb answer to all questions facing mankind. His work was of vast importance to witchcraft; he made specific the ideas which before had been rather vague or ambiguous.

The early medieval Church saw magic, described in the Canon Episcopi, as heathen superstition. In the thirteenth century this

magic became heresy by association with devil-worshippers. Aquinas supplied the rationale necessary to prove that the witch was a servant of the Devil; this crucial element was the pactum implicitum, the implicit pact. According to this theory, all magical practices involved a pact or contract, either tacit or explicit, with the Devil. The realization of any supernatural act required supernatural aid, if not from God, then from the Devil. Within this concept all magic or witchcraft involved apostasy from the Christian faith.⁴ Clearly, henceforth, all the practices of village superstition and magic would be termed witchcraft. Although Aquinas and the other scholars of his period did not invent the whole theory of the Devil's pact they clearly turned it from a nebulous idea into an unquestionable fact which could not be ignored by the Church. The concept of pact also included all agreements made, not just with the Devil, but also those arranged with demons.

The Scholastics established a most practical theory of demonology which was used to advantage against the witch.

Generations of medieval theologians had developed an elaborate and sophisticated demonology, which percolated down to ordinary men in a cruder and more immediate form. Demons had no corporeal existence, but it was notorious that they could borrow or counterfeit human shape. Medieval preachers enlivened their sermons with terrifying stories of the Devil's repeated appearances to tempt the weak and to carry away desperate sinners. The horns, tail, and brimstone of the medieval stage, and the grotesque creatures of Church sculpture and woodcarving helped to form the popular conception of Satan which has remained iconographically familiar until this day.⁵

The reality of demons and the personification of the Devil is difficult for the modern mind to take too seriously but both were

real and fearsome to the medieval mind. The intellectual atmosphere was ripe for such belief, especially as set forth and believed by the leading scholars of the times. The stress on the influence of demons played a large part in the rising fear of the witch in the thirteenth century. We have seen the degree of medieval credulity involving miracles; the acceptance of a belief in demons and Satan was a part of that same credulity. It is impossible to trace exactly the paleontology of the medieval acceptance of demons except to reiterate that humanity had always believed in invisible beings. The degree of this belief in their reality was reinforced in the Middle Ages by the Church, which stressed the hostility of these demons toward mankind.

Originally, such demons may have been hostile spirits of the dead. A more contemporary psychological approach places the origin of belief in demons in the projection of the destructive and uncontrollable forces within the self. ⁶ James H. Leuba cites four major sources of belief in unseen beings: states of temporary loss of consciousness such as trances, swoons, sleep; apparitions appearing in dreams, in the hallucinations of fever, and of insanity; the spontaneous personification of striking natural phenomena such as lightning, hurricanes or tornadoes; and the psychological necessity of a ⁷ creator of these strange happenings.

Medieval man was besieged by demons bent on the destruction of his virtue. Thoroughly convinced of this fact, every facet of his life was affected by his cognizance of their presence. The

literature of the Middle Ages is filled with accounts of demonic intervention, all described with sincere seriousness and credibility. One example will be sufficient to portray this credulity. It is difficult to read this or any such account without smiling and attributing them to unsettled minds. They are, however, too numerous to be dismissed as the hallucinations of deluded minds. The following quotation serves as typical of hundreds of such works which have survived. "Revelations" was written by the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Schonthal during the first half of the thirteenth century and describes in detail

...how he was daily and hourly infested by devils, whom, though he could not see, he heard, and to whom he imputed all the ailments of his flesh, and all the frailties of his spirit. If he felt squeamish, he was sure that the feeling was wrought in him by demonical agency. ...if his lower lip drooped, the devils had again to answer for it, a cough, a cold in the head, a hawking and spitting, could have none but a supernatural and devilish origin. ...If the abbot tossed on his sleepless couch, ...it was not the fleas and so forth that kept him awake... Vermin do not really bite; they seem to bite indeed, but it is all the work of devils. If a monk snored in the dormitory, the unseemly noise proceeded not from him, but from a demon lurking in his person. Especially dangerous were the demons of intoxication. These subtle fiends commonly lodged at the tavern in the neighboring town, but on feast days they were apt to slip through the monastery and glide unseen among the monks... If at such times a jolly, rosy faced brother appeared to the carnal eye and ear to grow obstreperous or maudling, to speak thickly or to reel and stagger in his gait, be sure it was not the fiery spirit of the grape that moved the holy man; it was a spirit of quite a different order.⁸

The effects on any society which believes itself completely the object or victim of such demonic assaults are incalculable. The whole complex system of religious and legal sanctions of such a community must be adjusted to what could be called a magical sense of life. This

adjustment included the rethinking on the part of all society of the position of the witches in relation to their community.⁹ This relationship was reflected, however imperfectly, in the changes wrought in the thirteenth century in the legal status of the witch.

At this time witches found themselves considered by the judicial process of their day as excepted cases. Since there was no crime so evil as that of apostasy, any method of apprehending the witch was acceptable. Witchcraft trials no longer left open the question of the existence of the Devil and demons; that had been settled. Beginning in the thirteenth century the question was simply whether an individual, on a certain occasion, had actually been operating in league¹⁰ with the Devil in a specific way. Since witchcraft was an allegiance with the Devil and the Devil would presumably help his own, extreme measures were needed to exact a confession from a witch. The old Roman procedure of torture was revived to an unlimited degree. Any plea against excessive torture was met with the argument that the Devil would¹¹ strengthen his own to resist all ordinary tortures. Against this argument society offered no reply; for the most part it was in agreement.

The cruelty to which the witches were subjected creates an unfair picture of the men of the Middle Ages who relentlessly persecuted the witch, and also of the uninvolved bystanders who either approved this cruelty or tacitly observed it. Today, when the sense of the supernatural is not as strong as it once was, people still form lynching parties, convincing themselves that they are motivated by a passion for righteousness, and believe themselves to be carrying out real justice.

Just so did medieval man reason: so, too, did the Inquisition.

The Cruelty of that institution was thought of as really mercy, for in stamping out the deadly contagion of heresy it diminished the sufferings and added to the 12 eternal sum of happiness that was in store for humanity.

The belief that the arrest of a witch was a service to mankind was no mere intellectual rationale but an idea sincerely believed by the prosecutors and populace as well. Actually, there is little documentary evidence that torture was used. Sometimes the records stated that a prisoner retracted the confessions which he had made under torture when these same confessions contained no mention of torture having 13 been used. This was perhaps intentional omission, since confessions made under torture were not considered valid and had to be confirmed by the prisoner after he was removed from the torture chamber, a feat not always easily accomplished. Therefore, the recorded confessions 14 were claimed to have been offered freely and spontaneously. This contradiction in the records raises suspicions but does not answer the question as to the extent to which torture was used.

The study of the intellectual achievements which affected the witch of the thirteenth century tends to stress the huge amount of knowledge which the men of that time did not have. The lack which was most harmful to the witch was in the field of medicine. Here the supernatural explanation of man's ills was particularly appealing where human impotence was quite obvious.

There was, for example, no satisfactory contemporary explanation for the sudden deaths which are today ascribed to cancer or heart disease, while the absence of any germ theory 15 made the onset of many kinds of infection utterly inexplicable.

Crying "witchcraft" also covered up inadequacies of contemporary doc- 16 tors or served to disguise neglect or incompetence.

Medieval medical practices differed little from the witches' cures themselves and were often simple old-wives cures. Lynn Thorndike quotes some marvellous cures from the Leech-Book of Bald and Cid, an Anglo-Saxon book of medicine and magical things. For example, "Radish roots tasted at evening protect one from the sharp tongue of a woman the next day."¹⁷ Insomnia must have been a prevalent disease calling for such remedies as "reading the first verse of the Gospel of John nine times over the patient's head, or placing beneath his head a missal or psalter..."¹⁸

Sometime within the thirteenth century the medieval world made reality out of ephemeral ideas, and mankind's view of the supernatural became humanized. The stiff, unyielding Christ of Romanesque art became the suffering, emancipated Christ of Gothic art. Christ the creator and judge became Christ the brother of mankind, and His new gentleness was furthered by the Cult of the Virgin. As Christ became humanized, so, too, did the Devil. He acquired an invisible reality, ever present and filled with immediate and terrible power.¹⁹ This humanization of supernatural beings, whether good or evil, bred a certain amount of familiarity. With familiarity came increasing curiosity and doubt.

Europe was beginning to enter into that inexpressibly painful period in which men have learned to doubt, but have not yet learned to regard doubt as innocent; in which the new mental activity produces a variety of opinions, while the old credulity persuades them that all but one class of opinions are the suggestions of the Devil.²⁰

This mental disquietude produced a vague anxiety which permeated the whole of thirteenth century society, an anxiety furthered by social changes and economic shifts which produced confusion, uncertainty and fear.

CHAPTER V

FOOTNOTES

¹C.S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 10.

²Wayne Shumaker, The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance (Berkley, Calif., 1972), p. 100.

³Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, eds., Witchcraft (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1972), p. 51.

⁴H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch-Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1962-1684 (Stanford, California, 1972), p. 17.

⁵Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (N. Y., 1971), p. 102.

⁶Jeffrey Burton Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages (Ithaca, N. Y., 1972), p. 102.

⁷James H. Leuba, The Psychological Origin and the Nature of Religion (London, 1921), p. 39.

⁸J. G. Frazer, Scapegoat (N. Y., 1951), p. 105.

⁹Julio Caro Baroja, The World of the Witches (Chicago, 1964), p. 13.

¹⁰J.B. Thayer, "Trial by Jury," Atlantic, Vol. LXV (April, 1890), pp. 465-481.

¹¹A.D. White, "Warfare of Thomasius With Unreason," Atlantic, Vol. VC, (May 1905), pp. 635-641.

¹²Phillip F. Waterman, The Story of Superstition, (N. Y., 1929), p. 243.

¹³Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, Vol. I (N. Y., 1901), p. 421.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 427.

¹⁵Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, (N. Y., 1971), p. 536.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 537.

¹⁷Lynn Thorndike, A History of Magic and Experimental Science, Vol. I (N. Y., 1929), p. 722.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 725.

¹⁹Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 101.

²⁰W.E.H. Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe, (N. Y., 1955), p. 72.

CHAPTER VI

THIRTEENTH CENTURY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES

One of the strangest paradoxes of the paradoxical thirteenth century was the disparity between the exalted lady of the chivalric troubadour, and woman, theologically, the destroyer of the world's virtue. But whether a noble lady or the matriarch of a peasant's hut, woman, in this century wielded great influence and power.

The docile obedience of the man to the woman seemed as reasonable to the thirteenth century as the devotion of the woman to the man, not because she loved him, for there was no question of love, but because he was her man, and she owned him as though he was her child.¹

Patristic tradition had consistently judged woman weaker than man physically, mentally and morally. Abelard blamed Eloise for leading him into ruin through carnal temptation as Eve had led Adam,² and as women had led men since the beginning of the world. Woman was not part of God's original plan but rather an afterthought, and often not such an auspicious afterthought. Eve and her temptations got man ejected from Eden; Pandora's curiosity loosed all manner of troubles upon mankind. That woman was a desirable disaster figured prominently in the myths of the world.

The world was created for man and not for woman. The female was proffered as a gift to her lord; and she³ was a gift that he soon discovered was decidedly faulty.

Such a creature as woman was to be feared, whether she sat exaltedly listening to songs in her honor, or scrubbed pots in her

wretched hovel. The order of ideas which produced this fear and horror of the fair sex is not difficult to follow.

Celibacy was universally regarded as the highest form of virtue, and in order to make it acceptable, theologians exhausted all the resources of their eloquence in describing the iniquity of those whose charms had rendered it so rare.⁴

Theologically, the anti-feminist crusade was based primarily on the inherent wickedness of the feminine sex; her unparalleled malignity, her inconceivable subtlety, frivolity, her unfaithfulness and unconquerably evil propensities. Such vehement attacks by theologians had considerable influence in predisposing man to believe in witches and in futhering the callousness with which the sufferings
5
of the victims were contemplated. Curiously, this view was contemporary with that of courtly love which exaggerated women to the levels of beings more lofty and spiritual, finer and less coarse than men. If there had been no parallel exaggerated contempt for women's morality and no exaggerated respect for her magical powers, witchcraft might not have been
6
solely the burden of the female sex.

Women were thought, in addition to possessing a degree of mental weakness, to be especially lusty creatures, preoccupied with sex. Since they were primarily desirous of satisfying their sensuality they were prone to diabolical contracts involving sexual union with the Devil. Such ideas made stories of seduction by the Devil psychologically plausible. The Devil, like God and all other important entities, was
7
masculine.

There were two conditions of women which naturally made them especially suspect of witchcraft. According to Midelfort, depression

or melancholy, which is more prevalent in the female than in the male sex, was often accompanied by threatening statements or odd behavior. The other more common attribute was isolation. Young women were under the protection of their fathers until they married, when their husbands took over. Female servants came under the protection of the male head of the household. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, feudal society was so geared to the family unit that anyone without a family was automatically peculiar, unprotected and suspect. As the feudal structure of the thirteenth century collapsed finally, family units scattered, populations shifted and more and more women⁸ found themselves isolated from their former protection.

The social structure of the early Middle Ages had been rural, aristocratic and religious in its judgment of values but in the thirteenth century the framework of medieval social structure began to crack.⁹

Three movements in particular affected the life of the rural districts: the rise of towns, the impetus to clearance and colonization, and the disintegration of the manor. All were connected with a still more fundamental economic movement, the growth of the population.¹⁰

The collapse of the old manorial system and the emancipation of the serfs that accompanied it greatly improved the lot of the peasantry. Medieval serfdom declined rapidly and broadly, although it did not wholly disappear. A revolution in the social structure affected every facet of thirteenth century life. By the end of the century the manorial system was a mere skeleton of what it once was. This revolution involved both persons and property. "New kinds of

property came into being, new changes ensued in the form and the degree¹¹ of possession. A new class of possessors was developed." The new peasant was in a class by himself, and his most obvious trait was suspicion of everything and everyone. Although no longer a serf, he detested his superior, temporal or spiritual, because both had a tendency to infringe on his new-found earnings. He was no longer servile, even if he were one of the peasants who missed his chance and remained a serf. Whether free peasant or serf he was far from civil; he was gross and cruel but no more so than his betters; morality was remarkably similar among all social classes.¹² His chief difference, when he became a landholding peasant, was that he was something new in European society, a new element to be assimilated.

The new condition of Europe, as universal as it was variegated, was attended everywhere by the fall of the old feudal government, old economy, old society. The tradition of the fief, the manor, the parish decayed. The old permanent links and associations, the old mutualism of interest, old behaviorism, old neighborhood fellowships, old local relations of person and of property gave way before a rapid succession of new changes, new contacts, new conditions, a new state of mind.¹³

This new class of society changed not only the makeup of the rural population but also the social structure of the towns. An enormous number of peasants, newly freed from their bondage to the land, migrated to the towns where they created a new group of unskilled laborers. Totally out of their familiar surroundings, they often constituted the masses of poor, frightened, and unemployed peoples which have remained a constant of modern society. This immigration to the towns was coupled with a growth in population unprecedented

in medieval Europe. A typical example can be taken from the Valley of the Moselle. In the year 1000 there were 352 villages with a population of 80,000. By 1237 the number of villages had increased to 1180 and the population risen to 250,000.¹⁴

Until about 1200 the social-economic problems of Europe were in the country. After that time they were in the towns, where the very congestion of population made them more acute than they had been before.¹⁵

This same congestion fostered a sense of group consciousness heretofore non-existent. There was an increase in public order, improvement of roads and bridges and a sense of social unity. The wealthy classes controlled the local town governments, local trade and industry. Guilds and industrial groups banded together to strengthen their own interests. A new balance of political forces became centered and accentuated in the towns. Town burgesses, in order to protect themselves from the masses whose turbulence threatened prosperity, supported the central authority with financial aid and military levies. Town dwellers, both old and new, formed a new political entity which would play a tremendous role in the rising sense of nationalism which was latent.¹⁶

Thus evolved a society beginning to assume the aspects of a modern materialistic community. The change from a completely other-worldliness to the concerns of this world created unrest among people accustomed to a far more simple existence. Removed from the familiarity of the countryside and fellow peasants, man found his surroundings strange and fearful.

The shifting population and employment produced an interior instability in medieval society, as opposed to the external threats that had plagued it earlier, and this internal instability caused widespread disequilibrium and discontent...The Crusades, the pogroms, the strife between papacy and Empire, the development of new monastic orders, the rise of mysticism, the growth of heresy and intolerance towards heresy, and finally the growth of 17 witchcraft itself were all symptoms of this discontent.

There have been three peaks in the persecution of witchcraft. Each of them was at a period when new ideas were threatening the authoritarian framework of the Church, and there had been latitude of faith with the threat of disintegration. The first peak was after the original wave of the Crusades had expended itself; the second during the Reformation period, and the last during the beginning of the Enlightenment. The first peak of persecution came in the thirteenth century when the external threats to Christianity were at abeyance as a result of a relative calm in the Near East. There was at the moment no immediate threat of Mohammedan invasion. It is the thirteenth century persecution with which we are concerned; 18 the period just after the phasing out of the Crusades.

The Crusades themselves had important effects on witchcraft, both in theory and in their contribution to economic changes which furthered general unrest. The direct changes fostered by the Crusades all contributed to the increased prosperity of the times, the growth of towns and population, and the general subtle shift towards materialism. The call to Europe's knighthood created an unprecedented demand for ready cash. Crusading was an expensive proposition. Money and moveable property were of great value; land was cheap. This

profitted many serfs whose meager cash became valuable enough to purchase their freedom; often, also, they found themselves in the position to buy a bit of land. Many peasants answered the call to fight the infidel, deserting the land for foreign plunder. This un-
 19
 tended land was then sold by the landowner who lacked workers.

Old trade routes were extended; new ones were opened. Towns, villages and inns sprang up along the routes. Sea power became more important. Travel, if not comfortable, at least, became more feasible. Imported goods greatly affected the general standard of living. The upper classes lived better than ever before, especially in the cities
 20
 which were enlarged and enriched by the Crusades.

A most important creation of the Crusades was business, especially banking, which formed the sub-structure of medieval enterprise. Businesses of all types flourished. Everyone desired to become rich, or at least to become less poor. The old theological ideal of voluntary poverty preached, if not always practiced, by the monastic orders vanished.

Immediately after the Crusades we find nearly all Europe rushing with extreme and long sustained violence into habits of luxury. The return of peace, the contact with the luxurious civilizations of the East, the sudden increase of wealth that followed the first impetus of commerce, all contributed to the movement. An extraordinary richness of dress was one of its first signs, and was encountered by a long succession of sumptuary laws. At the end of the thirteenth century we find Phillip the Fair regulating with the most severe minuteness the number and quality of the dresses of different classes of his subjects.²¹

The indirect influences of the Crusades in changing the atmosphere of Europe had a more striking effect on witchcraft than did the direct economic influences. Actually, it would be more accurate to

refer to the influence of Arabic and Byzantine civilization than to the influence of the Crusades. As T.E. Lawrence so aptly showed in his thesis, Crusader Castles, it is impossible to distinguish between the influences which followed the Crusades from those which developed simultaneously with the Crusades. It is equally impossible to judge the impact on the Westerners when they met the peoples of the Near East who had such a different religion, manners, and customs. Obviously, they recognized that here was a group of intelligent and cultured people, and a civilization in many respects superior to that of Europe. The Crusades created a new state of mind.

It must have been enlightening to meet heretics and infidels who were excluded from the salvation which could be found only in the Roman Catholic Church. At Constantinople the Crusaders found unimaginable wealth, power and magnificence. They discovered a culture and civilization far different from their own; the despised and hated schismatics were, in many cases, rather attractive children of the Devil. Returning home the Crusaders brought back to Europe the narrative genius of the Arabs which told, in a more marvellous manner than the Christian legends, the great adventures of chivalry, all mixed together with faries, genii, giants and miracles.

There were growing signs of Arabic influence in astronomy and astrology and also an increase in translations of Arabic authors. The Crusades enlarged the knowledge, widened the experience and, in general, quickened the intellect of European society. Ironically, the contact with admirable infidels did not inspire admiration for

heretics and witches at home. Rather the reverse occurred. The horror which the Church instilled in the Crusaders, at the risk of their immortal souls, seems to have overcome any tolerance which contact might have furthered. Although tolerance was not affected by contact with the Near East the emphasis on worldly concerns increased. As Europe was developing a more materialistic society, the wealth of the East became more impressive; men's treasures were increasingly in this world rather than in the next.²⁷

Because of the newfound importance of material possessions and life on this earth, the witch became more feared than ever. As long as man lived only for life after death the witches' maleficium could only hasten his arrival at his hoped-for destination. With the emphasis shifted to life in this world the witch wielded greater power. She could make this life miserable and destroy worldly goods and happiness.

If a single emotional attribute could describe the thirteenth century, that attribute would be fear. The uncertainties of a changing society bred fear, a fear which manifested itself in all sorts of popular movements or protests of rather grotesque violence. In 1251 the Pastoureaux, a group of French peasants and urban workers went about pillaging, burning and demanding betterment of their conditions. In 1237 more than a hundred people attempted to jump and dance their way for many miles, with many dying in transit. By the end of the thirteenth century the danse macabre began to be a theme in art and literature. Ritual flagellation began in 1260 in Perugia. Beginning

as a millennial cult, the ideas of beating oneself, or one another,
28
to heaven spread over Western Europe.

These bizarre reactions, plus heresy and witchcraft fears,
were attempts to allay the uncertainties of life with which the
thirteenth century could not cope. The religious, social and economic
institutions in this period of flux instead fostered the bewilderment
of thirteenth century humanity. The discrepancy between economic,
social, and political practices and beliefs, and the basic needs of
individuals creates the climate in which wars, panics, or mass move-
29
ments of any kind are undertaken. The mass movement and panic which
the thirteenth century had created was witchcraft.

CHAPTER VI

FOOTNOTES

¹Henry Adams, Mont-Saint Michel and Chartres (Boston, 1936), p. 207.

²Jeffrey Burton Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972), p. 145.

³Phillip F. Waterman, The Story of Superstition (N.Y., 1929), p. 199.

⁴W.E.H. Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe (N. Y., 1955), p. 98.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 145.

⁷H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684, (Stanford, California, 1972), p. 145.

⁸Ibid., p. 185.

⁹Lynn White, Jr., Machina Ex Deo: Essays in the Dynamism of Western Culture, (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 173.

¹⁰J. B. Bury, ed., The Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. VII (N. Y., 1932), p. 723.

¹¹James Westfall Thompson, An Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages (N. Y., 1928), p. 795.

¹²Adams, Mont-Saint Michel and Chartres, p. 234.

¹³Thompson, An Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages, p. 795.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 800.

CHAPTER VII
THE NEW WITCH

We have seen how the concept of the witch and her activities evolved. With the exception of the Sabbat, by the end of the thirteenth century all the characteristics of the witch were present and would be sustained throughout the four hundred years long mania.¹ If the gatherings mentioned in the Canon Episcopi are considered as Sabbats then the picture of the witch and her craft was complete by the end of the thirteenth century. Just precisely what the witches achieved and what others thought they could achieve were not always the same. Some so-called accomplishments were totally unreasonable although many, aside from the witches themselves, believed in their efficacy. The witch was feared primarily, not because of what she had done but for what she might do. Since there was no doubt of her influence over the forces of nature or her propensity for evil there was consequently no limit to what she might accomplish.

In general the following achievements were considered likely or possible by both the general public and many of the accused witches themselves. Everyone agreed that witches could and did: control the wind, raise or lay storms; cause droughts, famine, pestilence; estrange or unite lovers; make men impotent, women barren; delay the birth of children; destroy crops, attract or turn away schools of fish; steal milk from distant cows; prevent butter from turning, ale from fermenting;

madden or hypnotize horses; send showers of vermin wherever; cause floods, fires; sink ships or lose them at sea; cause men to hate or love; induce delusions and insanity, cause almost every illness, pain, wasting away; and commit murder magically. ² There seems to be no doubt that witches tried to accomplish these feats and that sometimes they succeeded; to that extent they were guilty of intent to perform evil deeds whether successful or not. Often perhaps success was due to the power of suggestion. Once a man knew or thought he knew himself the victim of maleficium he perceived himself afflicted with all manner of ills. Sheer terror was sufficient to produce strange pains, illness and reduce him to a nervous wreck. ³

By the end of the thirteenth century there were three categories of magical activities which were attributed to the witch: the magic that worked; the magic that sometimes worked or gave that impression; and the magic that witches frequently believed worked or was so imagined by their prosecutors and the general public. ⁴ It is of utmost importance to understand the differentiation among these types of magic. Some are readily explained by twentieth century science; some are still surrounded in mystery. The prime factor to be kept in mind is that in the thirteenth century not only was there no differentiation among types of magic, but also that all types of such magic were equally inexplicable. To prevent judging witches by modern standards each category mentioned above must be examined separately.

The magic that worked was merely the practice of medicine in its infant stage. Such magic originally applied to either good or evil

purposes. However, the thirteenth century knew no such person as the "white" witch, or ritual deemed "black" magic; these were inventions of a later age. Their country medicine consisted of the use of drugs and simples, the knowledge of which was age-old. Added to these medicines were charms or incantations to increase the efficacy of the herbal mixture. They were used much as a religious man of any age might murmur a prayer over the potion prescribed for his illness. It was not unusual for these incantations to be portions of the Mass itself. A typical example of such a prayer-incantation was the following cure for ague:

Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Nail the Devil to the post.
Thrice I strike with holy crook,
One for God, and one for Wod, and one for Lok.

The choice of deities invoked depended on cultural inheritance and geographical location. In the above quotation appeal was made to the Trinity, Wotan, Loki, and Thor's hammer.

One of the chief duties of the village medicine woman was that of midwifery. Unfortunately, this gave her first access to newly born unbaptised infants, thus increasing the credibility of the stories involving the theft of such babies for unholy brews. It is possible that such thefts did happen as the use of bloody meat or blood alone in magical concoctions is as old as magic itself, and certainly more easily accessible than dragon scales or eyes of newts.

The most fearsome knowledge possessed by the village medicine woman concerned the use of poisons. She surely must have taken advantage of the demand for such items. A number of lethal drugs which were

used by witches were commonly found in their possession; hemlock, aconite, belladonna, henbane, and foxglove, all frequently used. Shakespeare's brew concocted by the famous witches of Macbeth would have been quite deadly if everything had been omitted except the hemlock.⁸ To what extent the witches knew which ingredients produced the deadly effects is impossible to say. They did know for sure that certain potions produced the desired effects, and great care was taken in the preparation of each potion lest some ingredient be omitted, thereby resulting in failure. On this basis one might suspect that they were ignorant of the properties of the specific ingredients, trusting only in the effectiveness of the complete recipe. There is also ample evidence that they were familiar with narcotic and hallucinatory drugs which they administered to their patients to alleviate pain or produce twilight sleep, especially in childbirth cases. Anyone familiar with modern hallucinatory drugs can readily believe the sincerity of the visions of some of the patients who easily believed themselves bewitched after treatments by the midwives.⁹

Without delving into the subjects of faith healing and extra-sensory perception, we must mention the still unexplained ability of medicine women or witches who appeared to have possessed some degree of power in this regard. There is no medical doubt that some forms of psychosomatic illnesses can be healed through faith in an outside force working in a curative manner. That some people seem to be more successful at accomplishing these cures is a curious phenomenon attributed to psychic power. The theory is that this power, or resonance is

a form of electricity akin to magnetism. However, it cannot work unless stimulated by some impulse emanating from a human body. Presumably, it was this power to heal and deal with devils which Jesus gave to the disciples. The witches accordingly received similar abilities direct from the demons or the Devil himself. This subject presumes the existence of some force, as yet still unstudied, in the human body. Modern science has not explained it; the thirteenth century accepted it, explained, as usual, as the witches' acquisition from the Devil. Extra-sensory perception was attributed to the witches at this time and has yet to be explained, proved or disproved.¹⁰

The magic discussed so far worked whether or not it can be fully explained, as most of it now can. The second category of witches' abilities also frequently worked and also can usually be explained by modern science. The great majority of this type involved sympathetic magic dealing with images much in the Voodoo tradition. Image magic was popular in the thirteenth century as it had been for thousands of years. Modern medical-psychological opinion is that this type of magic works only when the victim is made aware that his destruction is being undertaken.¹¹ The lasting strength of such beliefs can be seen from the following example, not from the thirteenth century but from the twentieth.

Some dolls displayed in a British museum give evidence that image magic is still alive in more civilized areas than darkest Africa or the Haitian jungle. One figure, with a small knife stuck through its stomach, wears the uniform of a World War I nurse, another wears the uniform of a World War II A.T.S. sergeant, and has several pins stuck in it...¹²

Both images were products of civilian wives seeking to remove their military competition. Both are products of a way of thinking which we are often too quick to disregard as an out-dated form of ignorance. Evidently this type magic was as real to some of this century as it was to all in the thirteenth century.

The ability to affect another person or his property by the use of the evil eye was another prevalent trait of the new witch. The evil eye was not new but the degree of belief in, and fear of it, was. Such older beliefs have already been mentioned; relics remain in modern expressions such as "enchanting glances" and "bewitching smiles." Such expressions in the thirteenth century instilled fear and horror in anyone unfortunate enough to fall victim to them. Here again, if the magic worked, it was the fear which was the causative force, not the witch herself.

Possession, or the control of another by causing a demon to enter the body, was a feat at which the new witch reportedly excelled. Given the popular belief in demons plus the fear of the witch it was a reasonable belief.

Symptoms of demoniacal possession included writhing and contortions of abnormal origin, vomiting of strange objects, change of voice to deep, gruff tones, the incessant use of obscenities and blasphemies, lewd exposure, and acts of abnormal strength.¹³

Modern psychiatry explains these symptoms as some form of pathological hysteria or mental illness. The vomiting of pins and other weird objects remains as inexplicable now as it was in the thirteenth century. In the following four hundred years several such regurgitive cases were proved frauds, but most remain mysteriously unexplained.

By far the most fascinating of the presumed powers of the witch were those impossible tasks which everyone thought that the witch could accomplish. Often the witch believed herself capable of such actions. Unlike the previous capabilities, none of the following could be accepted by a modern sane person; all were believed by sane men by the end of the thirteenth century. In large part they are traceable to the myths and legends, ancient and medieval which have been discussed in prior chapters. Now they were part of the new witch, believed as much as the other types of magic which had at least some basis in reality. Since these ideas have been encountered before a brief resume only will be sufficient to include them in the witches' repertoire.

Popular belief held witches capable of transvection, with or without magic ointments. It was agreed that often such women only thought that they flew through the air, but since such thoughts were the Devil's work, the sin was real if the ride was not.

Mythology bears the responsibility for the marvelous stories dealing with the witches' metamorphoses into animals. Dressing in the skins of totem animals was a primitive custom, especially as part of fertility rituals. As animals, the witches supposedly cavorted with the Devil who often appeared in animal form. Dressing in animal skins and furs has always been a sex symbol; witness modern mink coats and the black leather jackets worn by virile young men on motorcycles.¹⁴

Europe did not domesticate the house cat until the seventeenth century, so the witches' black cats used as their familiars were not

known to the thirteenth century. However, demons in the form of small beasts of various descriptions are occasionally mentioned at that time. Witches, as we have seen, could affect the weather, and in the thirteenth century their effects were usually disastrous. A favorite method used cords and knots, another ancient device, and went as follows: three knotted cords determined the wind; undo one knot and a stiff breeze resulted; undo two knots and a strong wind blew; undo all three knots and the consequence was winds of gale proportions.
15

The most outstanding insight gained from all that has been said pertaining to the witch's feats at the end of the thirteenth century is that she did, or was thought to do, nothing that was intrinsically new. Therefore, the source of her influence lay in conditions outside the witch herself. This being so, why did so many women confess to being witches, to performing impossible tasks, to having recourse to demons and sexual encounters with the Devil? This aspect of witchcraft was new and unique beginning with the thirteenth century.

In considering these confessions and the descriptive material therein it is necessary first to omit those who must simply have been ill and in their psychotic state truly believed themselves to be witches, even when all evidence was to the contrary.
16 Also, some people are chronic confessors. Modern criminal agencies are accustomed to confessions for crimes which the confessor could not possibly have committed.

Men may make such confessions in order to attract attention or to gain peace of mind by publicly acknowledging a long concealed hostility towards other members

of society. Others accuse themselves of every possible sin out of a depressive sense of their own unworthiness.¹⁷

But what of the majority of the confessions? Most accused witches originally professed their innocence, even under torture. However, they eventually confessed, even in cases where it was doubtful that they were tortured. The simplest explanation lies in the nature of the interrogation itself. Most of the confessions would seem to conform to the preconceived ideas of the interrogators. The questions were of the "have-you-stopped-beating-your-wife?" variety.¹⁸ A simple yes or no answer was sufficient to prove guilt. Few women existed who had not practiced some seemingly magical medicine, which, once confessed, implicated them by association in all the sinister activities of the Devil worshipers. It is most unlikely that many such women had seen the Devil in person, although many confessed to attending witches meetings conducted by him.

These meetings, the so-called witches' Sabbats of later centuries, contributed greatly to the status of the witch by the end of the thirteenth century. Later experts added elaborate details of the goings on at these gatherings but as yet no description exists of a typical thirteenth century witches gathering. There is a great need for specialized studies of early witch trials which include descriptions of such gatherings. Most material on the trial proceedings is of a later date; Henry Charles Lea, the most comprehensive source, cites no trials before 1321, and his earliest treatise is Nider's Formicarius,¹⁹ written between 1435 and 1437.

However, one fact seems clear; no confession was considered complete without a witch's description of her activities at the

Sabbat. Drawing on the few extant trial stories, the Canon Episcopi, plus the sex orgies attributed to the Catharists, a composite picture of a Sabbat of the late thirteenth century emerges. The witch met with other witches to carry out certain rituals. The term "coven" is a late expression not found in thirteenth century sources. There was a ritual meal, but no Black Mass, also a later addition. The Devil, or someone pretending to be the Devil, was honored in Catharist fashion with a kiss on his backsides. Wild partying ensued in the dark, complete with dancing and sexual orgy. Most of the witches had sexual intercourse with the Devil himself at each Sabbat. This seems highly unlikely but under proper questioning was confessed, thereby tightening the union between the witch and the Devil. Much of the sensationalism of later Sabbats was not in evidence in the thirteenth century. Caesarius of Heisterbach (c.1220) in his Dialogues of Miracles tells of the indentures to the Devil which were sewn into the witches armpits at the Sabbat. Perhaps this was the for-
 20
 runner of the Devil's mark which witch-hunters later so avidly sought.

Very important to the new witch were the people who accused her. The general public was extremely credulous and pathologically fearful. There were, as has been shown, many causes for their fear in all facets of everyday life, and this fear reached its zenith in the fear of witchcraft. By the end of the thirteenth century this fear had reached paranoic proportions.

The paranoic who today believes that 'they' (e.g. the police, the government, the Jews, the black people, the Communists) are conspiring against him or his society, is the same man as the suspicious citizen of past centuries who accused witches. The focus of paranoia changes with regimes and fashions of belief but the type of emotion remains constant.²¹

The emotion of the thirteenth century had created the witch.

CHAPTER VII

FOOTNOTES

¹Jeffrey Burton Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages (N.Y., 1972), p. 22.

²Christina Hole, Witchcraft in England (N. Y., 1947), p. 14.

³Ibid., p. 20.

⁴Frank Donovan, Never on a Broomstick, (Harrisburg, Pa., 1971), p. 58.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Hole, Witchcraft in England, p. 102.

⁷Donovan, Never on a Broomstick, p. 58.

⁸Ibid., p. 60.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰T.C. Lethbridge, Witches, (London, 1962), p. 144.

¹¹Donovan, Never on a Broomstick, p. 63.

¹²Ibid., p. 64.

¹³Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁶Leopold Stein, "Loathsome Women" Newsweek, (Vol. 53, May 4, 1959), Pp. 50-51.

¹⁷Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic (N.Y., 1971), p. 519.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 517.

¹⁹Henry Charles Lea, Materials Toward A History of Witchcraft, Vol. II, (N. Y., 1957), p. 230.

²⁰Russell, Witchcraft in the Middle Ages, p. 120.

²¹Gillian Tindall, A Handbook on Witches, (N. Y., 1966), p. 33.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the thirteenth century every phase of society underwent drastic changes. For hundreds of years prior to this time Europe had existed in relative stability. Factors which had upset this stability somewhat were external and short lived, usually not affecting the average person to any great degree. Villages were small; feudal estates were self-contained; life offered little change. A man was born a peasant or serf as was his father before him and as his sons after him. Society was notably lacking in mobility; this lack of change instilled a certain degree of security. This applied equally to the manor born; their lives would follow the pattern of their immediate ancestors with little, if any, deviation. For serf and seignior alike the thirteenth century brought an end to the security of sameness. Henceforth man was forced to think, decide and reason for himself. Life presented alternatives; alternatives created dilemmas; dilemmas gave birth to uncertainty; uncertainty bred fear. Witchcraft grew out of thirteenth century modes of thought acting on a certain intellectual temperature, an emotional state with fear as its chief component.

All too often witchcraft has been left to the antiquarian, as if such a phenomenon could have happened in the past; that it could have no voice or bearing on the controversies of the present. This is far from the truth. Clearly, the thirteenth century added nothing

to the concept of the witch; ancient ideas were merely drawn together and disseminated. The contribution of the thirteenth century to witchcraft lay in its emotional climate. The climate of a society varies from one age to another, sometimes evolving slowly with changes so subtly made that they pass unnoticed. At other periods the transitions are abrupt and startling, demanding an explanation. Such swift changes produce psychological changes in the men who make up these societies, changes which force them to adapt to their new environment. A rapid change in one facet of existence is usually assimilated with a minimal upheaval. But several such drastic shifts produce a different reaction in a large portion of the population. Adjustment to many simultaneous changes is never smooth, and the confusion inherent in such a situation strongly affects and influences the beliefs and reactions of each individual within that society.

The thirteenth century population experienced far reaching changes in many basic areas in a relatively short period of time. Religion was struggling with internal disorders of gigantic proportions. Crusades against infidels had united Christendom; corruption and heresy within the Church weakened it. In an effort to unite against a common foe the Church found a scapegoat in the witch. Every force within the Church was brought to bear on this minority group in an effort to save mankind from destruction. Such salvation, according to the Church, demanded the destruction of the witch.

If all factors within thirteenth century Europe had remained static the Church would have found little support for its crusade

against witchcraft. However, the Church was only the overt factor, many others were present. Economic changes created unhappiness for some, joy for others. Either reaction was to have consequences for the witch. The newly freed serf, even though he was economically better off, was faced with problems with which he was inexperienced at solving. The nouveau riche were determined to remain so, and ever fearful for their prosperity, all the while doubtful of their ability to remain prosperous. Any society afflicted with such self doubt is permeated by self hate. It too demands scapegoats. It must find someone on whom its animosity may be spent, even though this hatred cannot be formulated very exactly.²

Unfortunately for the witch, the schoolmen for the thirteenth century did formulate the hatred and uncertainty into an elaborate acceptable explanation. Had they not been so adept at doing so, perhaps the witchcraft panic, left to itself, would never have evolved. That they undertook such a task was merely a reflection of the pre-occupation of thirteenth century thinkers with supernatural happenings of all sorts. They did not set out purposefully to create the witch; they did not have to, she already existed. But she did not exist in all the glory with which they ultimately crowned her. Nevertheless, they did their work well, and the end result was a being upon whom all could pin their fears. Inadvertently, the scholastics, the Church, economic prosperity and social change had together created the thirteenth century climate that demanded a scapegoat. Had any of these factors been absent, or had remained stable, the witchcraft fear probably would

not have gained such force. But everywhere there was uncertainty; society needed scapegoats.

The idea of witchcraft as a pathological social phenomenon is a relatively new one: and it is a complex theory. Voluminous as the source material is there are huge gaps in our knowledge; most of the material is of a general nature. Only recently have studies begun³ on witchcraft trials and materials in specific areas or times.

Obviously, there will be variations from place to place. Previous scholars have picked a cause for witchcraft and proceeded to justify their cause without enough specific proof to warrant eliminating all other influences. That one of the previously mentioned causes of uncertainty and fear prevalent in the thirteenth century might singly have caused witchcraft does not seem probable. All the conditions of unrest were present and it would seem reasonable to conclude that each in some degree contributed to the emotional state from which the witch emerged. Therefore it can be concluded with some degree of assurance that witchcraft was developed out of an emotional atmosphere of fear which permeated the thirteenth century to a unique degree. Herein lies the relevancy of witchcraft for modern society.

It is disconcerting to consider the extent to which humanity can be influenced by fears of an unknown factor while it is in a period of internal flux or instability. Witchcraft is at present undergoing a revival of sorts; not medieval witchcraft, per se, but more a pagan version. The occult, spiritualism, astrology, millennial religions and all sorts of supernatural interests are popular.

Reformism is prevalent in and out of churches of all denominations. Social changes are too numerous to enumerate. The world economy is chaotic. The twentieth century abounds in uncertainties. Mankind still fears unknowns, though not supernatural ones as did the thirteenth century steeped in its religious orientation. This century is a scientifically oriented one, so perhaps its scapegoats should be sought in today's science fiction villains. As ancient mythology became medieval reality future scapegoats may lie in the imagination of modern writers of space myths. The causative forces of witchcraft in the thirteenth century are not so unique as they seem at a superficial glance. The end result, the witch, was a logical evolution for her time. The witch is no longer relevant; the evolution of the fears of which she was born will remain relevant so long as the basic fears of humanity remain.

CONCLUSION

FOOTNOTES

¹W.E.H. Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe, (N.Y., 1955), p. 152.

²Lynn White, Jr., Machina Ex Deo: Essays in the Dynamism of Western Culture, (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 173.

³H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany, 1562-1684 (Stanford, Calif., 1972).

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